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A
LETTER
TO THE
BISHOP OF SALISBURY,
On his late Charge.

—◆—
1798.



A
LETTER
TO THE
BISHOP OF SALISBURY,

ON HIS LATE CHARGE

To the Clergy of his Diocese.

BY A DISSENTER.

Money is still the common scale
Of things by measure, weight, and tale;
Ev'n in th' affairs of Church and State,
It's both the balance and the weight;
For what's the worth of any thing,
But so much money as 'twill bring.

What's orthodox, and true believing,
Against a conscience—a good living;
What makes all doctrines plain and clear—
About two hundred pounds a year;
And that which was prov'd true before,
Prov'd false again—two hundred more.

HUDIBRAS.

W. H. A dissenter

Salisbury:

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1798.

LETTER

BISHOP OF SALISBURY

OF HIS GRACE


THE BISHOP OF SALISBURY

BY A. H. H. H. H.



A
LETTER

TO
THE BISHOP OF SALISBURY.



MY LORD,

I WISH to address you with all the deference due to your exalted station, the amiableness of your private life, and the deserved eminence of your literary character.

MANY different accounts having gone abroad in the world, and others having appeared in the public papers, of the subject of your late Charge to the Clergy, against the Dissenters; a considerable number of that respectable body of Christians are alarmed, though I hope without just cause. It was expected, my Lord, that you would have published it, in order that no wrong

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interpretation might have been made of it; but this not being the case, you will excuse me, I hope, if I make a few comments on what is published as the purport of it, in the Salisbury Journal, which being put forth as it were under your eye, is likely to be the most correct.

“ THE Charge was principally directed to the increased activity of Dissenters of various denominations, and the great number of licenced Preachers registered in the course of last year, (an increase I understand from seven to forty) and you urged the great expediency and necessity of exertions from the parochial Clergy, to *prevent* the delusions, to which the lower classes of people, especially in villages, are thereby exposed. The dangers of innovation, and the false but prevalent philosophy of the times, were strongly urged, with their direful effects in a neighbouring country, &c.”

THE Dissenters wish to know, my Lord, what is your proposed method of lessening their numbers, and preventing the lower classes of the people from following them. Are they to be persecuted,

cuted, or have you directed your Clergy to out-preach them? Do you intend to make short work with them, as Daniel De Foe hinted at, or convince their understandings in the manner my Lord Peter used to convince his brothers Martin and Jack?

I DOUBT, my Lord, the policy of meddling with them at all, and am of opinion that it will only tend to unite them more together. To use a rough simile, if sheep are feeding quietly in separate pastures, and a great dog barks at them, they will all fix their eyes on him and herd together the closer.

MANY serious and thinking people amongst us were in hopes your Lordship would, instead of raising a discussion that has long been laid asleep, rather have turned your attention towards the great encrease of Infidelity and Atheism; and with the powers of your discriminating mind, (which could detect a Lauder and a Bower) have pointed out the best mode of attacking our common enemy. But alas, my Lord! I fear he is too strongly entrenched within the pale of your own Church already, and that you are afraid to attack

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enemies

enemies of such high blood, and therefore turn your artillery against us poor Dissenters.

I WILL tell you, my Lord, that the cause of the increase of the Dissenters, is not so much their increased activity, as the decreased attention of the Clergy to their parochial duties. For it is well known that where Clergymen reside and do their duty properly, the Dissenters do not easily find a footing.

I WISH, my Lord, your attention had been rather directed to the growing indifference of your own Clergy to the duties of their office, and their unqualified pursuit of pleasure ; for it is of no use to exclaim against the encreasing numbers of the Dissenters, while your Clergy endeavour "to make God's work a sinecure." Did you, my Lord, note this, and recommend the study of the Scriptures as their supreme delight and occupation? I wish you had. They tell you when you ordain them that they are moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon them their office. But is it not well known to your Lordship that this is in many instances nothing but a solemn farce ; and instead of answering you that they trust they are

are so moved, would it not be more in character to answer in the words that John's disciples candidly answered to Paul?—"We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost."

It is likewise well known that many of them never preach their own sermons, but buy of the Doctor whom Cowper calls "the grand caterer and dry-nurse of the Church."

Who teaches those to read, whom schools dismiss'd
And colleges untaught; sells accent, tone,
And emphasis in score, and gives to pray'r,
Th' adagio and andanté it demands.
He grinds divinity of other days
Down into modern use; transforms old print
To zig-zag manuscript, and cheats the eyes
Of gallery critics, by a thousand arts.

THE serious Christian "who is hungry for the bread of life" will not be so served. He will either withdraw himself from Church, or will seek aid against his infirmities in those assemblies of Christians where he thinks the service of the heart is offered, notwithstanding the deficiency of forms and imperfections of language and of grammar.

DR.

DR. CLARKE, in his Sermon "on a virtuous mind being the best help to understand true religion," says, "That there is a spirit and a life in the discourse of a righteous man, proceeding from the sincerity of an upright heart, which no skill nor art can imitate. There is a knowledge and a discernment arising from virtuous practices, which another man cannot learn from him that has it, but by going and doing likewise. The pure in heart see God here, as well as hereafter, after another manner than vicious and profane philosophers argue about him." *

YOUR Clergy, therefore, my Lord, to be respected, beloved, and followed, should learn to respect themselves more than they do, and live more according to the doctrines they preach.

Would I describe a preacher, such as Paul,
 Were he on earth, would hear, approve, and own,
 Paul should himself direct me. I would trace
 His master's strokes, and draw from his design;
 I would express him, simple, grave, sincere,
 In doctrine uncorrupt; in language plain;
 And plain in manner. Decent, solemn, chaste,
 And natural in gesture. Much impress'd

Himself,

Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,
 And anxious mainly, that the flock he feeds
 May feel it too. Affectionate in look
 And tender in address, as well becomes
 A messenger of grace to guilty men.
 Behold the picture! Is it like? Like whom?
 The things that mount the rostrum with a skip,
 And then skip down again. Pronounce a text,
 Cry hem; and reading what they never wrote
 Just fifteen minutes, huddle up their work,
 And with a well bred whisper close the scene!

THE more they depart from the principles and practices of their duty, the more room they give these horrid men, the Dissenters, to make converts.

AND what signifies even a good sermon, if the person hurries it over in such a manner as hardly to be understood by the congregation, and with a visible haste to be gone, and perhaps is seen no more till that day se'nnight, when he comes again in the same haste? Of what service to a flock is such a pastor? If they see him by chance in the week, is it to receive good advice? No; he is either hunting or shooting, or swearing, or drinking, or equipt like a Jockey in a velvet cap, a huntsman's belt, or buckskin breeches, or a scarlet

scarlet coat, or some dress quite in the kick of the fashion.* Paul's description of the dress he recommends to his Clergy is really very different.†

I GO to Church sometimes, and for my part, whether I hear a Clergyman or a Dissenter, I shall always

—Venerate the man whose heart is warm,
 Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life,
 Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
 That he is honest in the sacred cause;
 To such I render more than mere respect,
 Whose actions say that they respect themselves.
 But loose in morals, and in manners vain,
 In conversation frivolous, in dress
 Extreme, at once rapacious and profuse;—
 Constant at routs, familiar with a round
 Of ladyships, a stranger to the poor;
 Ambitious of preferment for its gold,
 And well prepar'd by ignorance and sloth,

By

* It appears by the Dorsetshire game list, annually published, that full one-eighth of the certificates are for Clergymen.

† PUT on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done all to stand.—Stand therefore with your loins girded about with truth, and having on the breast plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace, (not war either offensive or defensive.)

By infidelity, and love o' th' world,
 To make God's work a sinecure; a slave
 To his own pleasures and his patron's pride—
 From such Apostles, Oh ye mitred heads,
 Preserve the Church! and lay not careless hands
 On sculls that cannot teach, and will not learn.

I WILL remind your Lordship of an historical fact. The Bishop of Beauvais, after urging on a war, (as many of your Clergy have done) at length appeared at the head of an army and was taken prisoner by our good King Richard the First. The Pope having heard of it, remonstrated with Cœur de Lion upon the cruelty and injustice of imprisoning a Son of the Church, and declared that the Bishop was out of all secular jurisdiction. Upon which the King sent him the Bishop's coat of armour, accompanied with a sentence out of Scripture,—Look and see if this be thy son's coat or no?

I HAVE the honour, my Lord, to be acquainted with many of your Clergy, who are sensible moderate men, and they are much in my esteem; they have no idea that fighting for religion is any christian duty, nor will they urge it as a duty in
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their sermons to any one. They know the kingdom they are appointed to promote is not of this world. If it were of this world, then would its servants fight, and then only.

BUT what my Lord, can be more shocking to the feelings of yourself and every follower of the meek and humble Jesus, than to read in the public papers of last week of the Rev. Mr. Kirk,*
 Vicar

* *Extract from the Sun Paper of August 25, 1798.*

On Saturday the 11th instant the Third West York Regiment of Militia, commanded by Lord Harewood, received their Colours at Scarborough.—The four companies at head-quarters were drawn up on the exercise ground on the Castle Hill, and having formed a hollow square, the Colours were unfurled and consecrated by the Rev. Mr. KIRK, Vicar of Scarborough, by the following Prayer of dedication :

“ O Lord God Omnipotent, without whose aid the multitude of an host and all the instruments of war are but weak and vain ; continue, we entreat thee, thy special grace and mercy to this land and kingdom, to which we belong. Bless and preserve from every danger our rightful Sovereign, our Queen, and every branch of his illustrious line; and grant that his reign may be long and glorious. Direct his Councils, and inspire all who have the management of our national concerns, with such true wisdom, piety, and zeal for the common good, that their endeavours may tend to promote thy glory, and the tranquillity
 and

Vicar of Scarborough, furrounded by a large body
 soldiers, (of men armed with instruments of
 death and slaughter—men trained to the art of
 destroying their fellow creatures) holding a pair
 of

and essential interests of this nation. We beseech thee still to go forth
 with our Fleets and Armies. Look graciously upon all those assembled
 here before thee, who now lift up their banners in thy name, and
 implore thy blessing and protection in the righteous cause, in which,
 as a nation, we are at this time engaged—the cause of thee, O God,
 our Country, and our King. Before thee, O Lord, we display these
 standards, and with the profoundest reverence, consecrate and dedicate
 them to thy service and to thy glory. And may we all exert our
 utmost efforts for the protection of our Holy Religion, and whatever
 else is, or ought to be, dear to us as a Christian people. Save and
 deliver us, we humbly beseech thee, from our remorseless enemies,
 who have spread desolation wherever they have erected their standard;
 “abate their pride, assuage their malice, and confound their devices.”
 And, O thou, that “stillest the rage of the ocean, and the tumult of
 the people,” hasten, we entreat thee, the glorious time when the world
 shall be delivered, by thy mercy, from the scourge of war, and of civil
 insurrection; “when nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
 and they shall not learn war any more.”—Grant this, O Heavenly
 Father, and whatever else is expedient for us, for the sake, and through
 the merits, of thy dear Son Jesus Christ our Lord; beneath the sacred
 banner of whose cross enable us all manfully to contend against sin,
 the world, and the Devil; and zealously to approve ourselves faithful
 soldiers and servants to our lives end. Amen.”

of colours in his hands, and thus addressing the Deity, (whose darling attributes are mercy and compassion :) “ Before thee, O Lord, we display these standards, and with the profoundest reverence consecrate ! (Oh horrid) consecrate and dedicate them to thy service and to thy glory ! And may *we all* (soldiers, finners, and all) MAY WE ALL exert our *utmost endeavours* for the protection of our holy Religion, and whatever else is or ought to be *dear to us* (*Query*—does he include the Vicarage of Scarborough ?) as a christian people. (Of this I suppose every foldier is to be a sufficient judge.) Grant this, O heavenly Father, through the merits of thy dear Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Is this, my Lord, in the spirit of that Religion you uphold ?—impossible !—Rash impious mortal ! thou consecrator of human slaughter—put a turban on thy head, and never look into any book but the Koran ; for thou art a disciple of Mahomet and not of Christ. Weak man ! does the Almighty want thy efforts, the services of a worm, to advance his glory, or promote the interest of that kingdom, which he himself hath set
up

up against all the powers of the earth, and which he has declared shall never be destroyed? Be not deceived; God cannot be thus mocked. If all the establishments on earth fail, Christianity, we are assured from the highest authority, will remain (in its native purity and simplicity) to the end of the world.

AND it is not the efforts of a Kirk of this century, nor a Kirk of the last century, nor the efforts of a hundred thousand Kirks that can in this manner effectually serve Christianity. It must be something different from Christianity that he is so earnest to defend, though that is made the ostensible object—the stalking horse.

SURELY we are gone back to the days of Peter the hermit—and this, my Lord, is another cause of the declining influence of the Clergy; their being, generally speaking, such abettors of this unhappy war. Men whose professed business is to preach peace on earth, and good will to men, to use such a senseless phrase as fighting for Religion, and on any occasion, consecrate *ensigns of war*. It is a gross offence to the feelings

ings of all unprejudiced men, since the Author of that Religion has so frequently * and strictly forbidden it, and surely he must know all possible cases that could arise to call for it.

MEN are shaking off their prejudices daily, and learning (very properly I think) to judge for themselves—a door is opened that cannot be shut. They will no longer have that imposed on them for religion, which appears only to be the effect of human policy and priestcraft. Men will no longer be persuaded that they shall perish everlastingly, if they do not believe the Athanasian Creed. Is it not on record † in the debates of the House of Commons, and which remains uncontroverted; that many of the thirty-nine articles (which are a human composition) are contrary to the Scriptures, and shocking to rational Christians—assertions, the justness of which, many of your own bench, my Lord, have been known to

* “ Put up thy sword, for all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword. I say unto you, resist not evil.” Ye know not what spirit ye are of; (when some wanted to command fire from heaven upon their adversaries.)

† Feb. 6, 1772.

to acknowledge, in times of greater tranquillity, and which none on the bench to this day can seriously deny?

THE opposition of the great men of the State to new opinions is not always a proof of their fallacy. The greatest character that ever appeared on earth, met with the greatest opposition, from the Sanhedrim, and from the chief priests and elders. They had the same cry then as they have now. No innovation! let us have no innovation! There was one honest man, however, amongst them, who gave them very good advice, which I wish *our* Bishops and great men would likewise follow.* Peter and the Apostles were going to be prosecuted with the utmost vengeance of the law, and perhaps with a vigour beyond the law, for saying things that offended the establishment; and in this, the world does not seem much changed, for the same practice goes on to this day.

REMEMBER,

* "YE men of Israel take heed what ye intend to do as touching these men, &c. if this counsel be of men, it will come to nought, but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, and ye will be found fighting against God."—Acts v. 34.

REMEMBER, my Lord, the same objections you urge against Dissenters, were urged once against you, before the reformation, when you yourselves were the Dissenters, and abused as the broachers of new opinions. Your Lordship knows this too well to need my saying any more on the subject.

MY Lord, I will tell you another story that falls in pat with the present argument :—

WHEN the King of Prussia made his first expedition into Silesia, a little Protestant hamlet, which was near a Roman Catholic village, came to his Majesty, and with all possible humility begged permission to kill all the inhabitants of the said village. The King considered the deputies, whilst they were speaking, with very serious attention. Pray, Gentlemen, said he, as soon as they had finished, if that Roman Catholic village, which so offends you, were to solicit permission of me to murder you, would you think it just in me to suffer them? Oh, gracious Sovereign, replied the deputies, the case is exceedingly different—*WE are the true Church.*

THE

THE force of prejudice, my Lord, is very great, you know, upon the minds of some men, who, in the common affairs of life, may be, in every other respect, good and amiable.

HALL, the historian, relates, that he himself knew one Pavier, the Town-Clerk of London, who, though in the main a well meaning inoffensive man, had entertained such a horrid idea of the holy Gospels being translated and read in the English tongue, that he heard him, as he was standing by with others of his acquaintance, swear with a great oath, that if he thought that the King's Highness would do such a thing as to set forth the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue, and let it be read of the people by his authority, rather than he would live to see it, he would cut his own throat. And the next year, when the King's order came forth for that purpose, he destroyed himself.

THE people at large are likewise often, for a time, under the same delusions. When Henry the Eighth reformed the religion so far as to admit no more than three sacraments, (Baptism,

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Marriage,

Marriage, and the Lord's Supper,) instead of seven, and also struck out some of the Saints' Days occurring in harvest time; the inhabitants of the Northern Counties (says Hall, a contemporary writer) rose in vast numbers, and formed a rebellion, using these words, " See, friends! they have taken away four of the Sacraments from us, and shortly we shall have the other three taken away, and thus all the faith of the Holy Church shall be suppressed, and utterly abolished.—Let us fight, my friends, to the last drop of our blood to maintain religion; hereby thinking (says Hall) that they were doing God service."—And pray, how far different is the common cry at this time?

BUT why, my Lord, should you be so alarmed at the encrease of the Dissenters?—They leave your Church in the peaceable possession of all their emoluments.—They will not disturb you, if you do not disturb them. Are they not Christians, as well as yourselves, and full as diligent to approve themselves the faithful followers of Jesus Christ?

WHEN

WHEN Infidelity and Vice are stalking abroad without controul, and attacking Religion on every side, is it a time to shew your jealousy of them? Be a little more liberal towards them, my Lord; on this important ground, they are your friends and fellow-labourers.

It is too much the fashion and custom for the Dignitaries of your Church to abuse us every now and then, and when any mischief happens, to attribute it to us; just as a favored child in a family will lay the blame of its own pranks upon its younger brothers and sisters.

THE late Archbishop of York (Dr. Drummond) was so illiberal as to abuse us in the House of Lords, when we petitioned for our rights, by saying we were men of close ambition—What answer did my Lord Chatham give him? “They are so, my Lord,” said he, “and
 “their ambition is to keep close to the college
 “of Fishermen, not of Cardinals; to keep close
 “to the doctrines of the inspired Apostles, not to
 “the decrees of interested and aspiring Bishops.
 “They contend for a spiritual creed, and a
 D 2 “Christian

“ Christian worship—We have a Calvinistic
 “ creed, a Popish liturgy, and an Armenian
 “ clergy. The Reformation has laid open the
 “ scriptures to all men. Let not the Bishops shut
 “ them again, by substituting forms of their own
 “ creation, in the room of the holy scriptures.”

WHAT was Paul's conduct at Corinth, when several sects made their appearance there in his Church, some of which (Dissenters) drew away his hearers? Was he alarmed or jealous on that occasion? No! “It hath been declared unto me, says he, that there are divisions (sectaries) among you. One of you saith I am of Paul, another of Apollos, another of Peter, another of Christ.—Is Christ then divided, or was it Paul that was crucified for you, or were ye baptized only in the name of Paul?—Are ye not carnal when ye thus speak? Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers of the same Gospel, by whom ye believe? I have planted, and Apollos has watered, but (after all) it is God that must give the increase. Are ye not all of God's husbandry, and we preachers, all labourers together for God? For other (per-
 manent)

manent) foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid in Christ Jesus.—For the times shall try them, and if any man's work abide, he shall receive compensation," &c. &c. As they agreed with him in the essentials, he was satisfied. As he was convinced they loved the truth, and were ministers of the same Gospel as himself, he did not meddle with them. The particular merit or demerit he left for the world to try and prove.

THE right of private judgment, my Lord, he knew was essential to be maintained, and he had charity for all those who differed from him. "The right of individuals, (says Dr. J. Jebb,) to judge and act for themselves in matters of a religious nature, is a right of so important a kind, that no zeal can be too fervent, which aims at its establishment; and no indignation can be too severe, which is manifested against those who impiously invade it. I resign to the Magistrate the power of avenging those wrongs which I suffer from men of like passions with myself; and my liberty, my truest liberty, consists in my submission to those equal laws, which, without

without respect of persons, guard my property, my reputation, and my life.

“ But when I direct my views to future happiness, I look not to the person of the magistrate for information and advice ; he is a weak, frail, ignorant, erring mortal, like myself. I therefore, in such a case, look up to the tremendous Majesty of Heaven, and humbly confide in that word, which the Almighty hath thought proper to reveal. I search with my own eyes, and with my own understanding, and with earnest solicitude, for that truth, in the discovery of which I am so immediately concerned ; and as the power of the greatest Monarch upon earth cannot deliver me from the dominion of the grave, I will, in religious matters, bow to him alone, who alone is Lord of life and death.”

THE motto of my book, though written a hundred years ago, is by no means inapplicable to the present times. I have no doubt but that, if we had some good rich benefices to give away, we should have many of your Clergy join us.

Nay,

Nay, if we could give him a thousand a year more than he now has, I would venture a small wager, that Dr. Horsley himself, the great Champion of the Church, might turn his artillery against those very doctrines he appears now so earnest to maintain.

YET, my Lord, I should be very sorry to see any sect of Dissenters established upon the ruins of your Church. History too fatally points out that the spirit of man leads those who think they have been oppressed, to oppress in their turn. I want to see party spirit destroyed, by a liberality of sentiment toward those who understand the Scriptures differently from ourselves. If your Church had been more attentive to have reformed its own errors, its corruptions, and inconsistencies, and in due time to have enlarged its pale, so as to have received from time to time the good and conscientious of every denomination of Christians,* you would have had no reason to complain

* Was it even good policy, to shut out from your Church such excellent and worthy men as Henry, Watts, Doddridge, Grove, Chandler, Leland,

complain of the growth of the Dissenters, nor for your present fears. But as it now stands, even if Paul the Apostle were on earth, and attempted to preach in any Cathedral in England, he would be liable to be turned out and punished. You know he could never subscribe the thirty-nine articles.

EVERY man of the least humanity must be shocked at the enormities committed in France, and deplore the destruction of so many good men ; but it is the opinion of many that there is, even now, as much real vital religion in France as there has been these hundred years. When the true religion was overthrown in Judea, by Ahab ; all her priests murdered, idolatry established, and the faithful persecuted every where ; the holy prophet Elijah sunk into despair, and
thought

Leland, Abernethy, Pierce, Hallet, Duchal, Lowman, Lardner, Taylor, Orton, Fownes, Furneaux, Jebb, &c. &c. The strength and duration of the Roman Empire was greatly owing to their selecting from their enemies, after peace was made, all the men eminent for their courage and virtue ; admitting them to the privileges of Roman Citizens, and then advancing them to posts of eminence.

thought himself the only one left, that had not forsaken the God of their fathers; but was it not revealed to him, by the Searcher of all hearts, that there were more than seven thousand, who, notwithstanding the dangers of the times, had in no instance, bowed the knee to Baal? Let us not then, my Lord, sorrow (in these awful times) as those without hope. The Christian Religion is of that heavenly temper, which is not to be hurt by danger and persecution. It has always flourished best and purest in such times, and he that first planted it, watches over it, and will preserve it to the end of the world.

I have the Honor,

And the pleasure to remain,

Your Lordship's humble servant,

H. W.

Salisbury,

SEPTEMBER 11, 1793.

POSTSCRIPT.

IF I have made any observations in this Letter which are not applicable to your Lordship's Charge, you will please to attribute it to the circumstance of your not having favoured the public with an authentic copy of it.



